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Survey of Communist Military Developments in Indochina

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March 27, 1975

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**SURVEY OF COMMUNIST
MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA***

(This report covers the period
March 13-26, 1975)

The Key Points

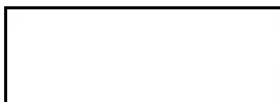
- The South Vietnamese have suffered severe territorial losses during the past two weeks. Almost all of MRs 1 and 2 have been lost, and Da Nang is now seriously threatened.
- Very heavy infiltration continued this reporting period. It now appears that infiltration this dry season will approach or exceed the 136,000 troops sent south during the 1971/72 cycle.



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- As a result of North Vietnam's manpower commitment, the Communists' combat order of battle has risen from 183,000 to 200,000. At the same time, South Vietnam's order of battle has fallen sharply from 355,000 to 337,000.
- Hanoi is deploying substantial quantities of armor, artillery, and air defense equipment in support of its forces in South Vietnam.
- Rice and petroleum stocks in Phnom Penh remained about the same during the past two weeks, but ammunition stocks declined.

* This report has been prepared jointly by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense.



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Preface

This report summarizes evidence received during the reporting period of (I) Communist efforts to infiltrate new manpower and military supplies toward and into South Vietnam, (II) significant combat activity, and (III) other developments affecting Communist military capabilities in Indochina.

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Redeployments

5. The launching of the Communist 1975 offensive in South Vietnam and President Thieu's unexpected realignment of South Vietnamese forces have led to a large number of redeployments by major military units, both in North and South Vietnam. These include the movement of Hanoi's infantry reserves to the south as well as the strengthening of its air defense posture in the southern panhandle. Within South Vietnam, the Communists also have redeployed their units to bring maximum pressure on key South Vietnamese positions. As a result of the growing Communist pressure, the South Vietnamese decided to redeploy their forces to more defensible positions, and have given up very large areas in northern South Vietnam. These redeployments and those of the Communists are discussed below.

North Vietnam

6. In addition to infiltration, Hanoi's manpower commitment to the south this dry season includes three infantry divisions

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8. At the same time, a third regiment of the division has been identified in Binh Long Province of MR 3. Prisoners captured from the division during the recent fighting there claim they were part of the 2,000-man NVA 273d Regiment which infiltrated in mid-February. The regiment apparently was to fill the void created by the move westward of most of the 9th Division to attack Tri Tam in Binh Duong Province and, subsequently, South Vietnamese positions in eastern Tay Ninh Province.

9. The NVA 316th Division, which had shown signs of moving since mid-January is now in South Vietnam's MR 2 - having deployed undetected. An NVA prisoner captured in the recent fighting at Ban Me Thuot in Darlac Province claims to be from the 316th.

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South Vietnam

Military Region (MR) 1

14. The removal of the Airborne Division from MR 1 and the rapid attrition of many of the remaining South Vietnamese units during the current Communist offensive have contributed to a swift deterioration of ARVN defenses in MR 1 and enabled the Communists to gain a strong upper hand. Communist forces have gained control of four of the region's five provincial capitals in an eight-day period, culminating with South Vietnam's abandonment of Hue. Additional enclaves along the coast of Quang Tin and Quang Ngai Provinces will also change hands as soon as the South Vietnamese complete current evacuation operations. These evacuations will leave Da Nang as the sole government possession in MR 1.

15. The withdrawal last week of the Airborne Division, which had been a major part of ARVN defenses for Hue and Da Nang since the cease-fire, marked the beginning of the period of alarming setbacks in MR 1. Two brigades - the 1st and 2d - were sent to Saigon to serve as a reserve force for MR 3, while the 3d Brigade, also originally destined for Saigon, was diverted to coastal MR 2. The removal of the Airborne Division initially forced ARVN to consolidate its defenses in the northern part of the region around Hue and Da Nang. Late last week, two marine brigades were redeployed out of Quang Tri Province. One was sent to the Da Nang area, while the other moved into southern Thua Thien Province to provide added protection for the strategic Hai Van Pass overlooking Route 1

[REDACTED]

16. Communist forces reacted swiftly to the redeployment of South Vietnamese units by overrunning Quang Tri City on March 19 and effectively eliminating all government control in the province. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The South Vietnamese were able to block the drive

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temporarily at the My Chanh River along the Quang Tri - Thua Thien Province line with a mixture of ranger, marine, and local forces.

17. The loss of Quang Tri significantly increased the threat to Hue, which was already threatened by a formidable Communist force in Thua Thien Province, including the 324B and 325th Divisions and several independent regiments. Until a few days ago, the South Vietnamese were determined not to give up Hue without some resistance. Since then, however, the My Chanh defense line and several other positions have crumbled, and the decision was made to withdraw to Da Nang. The forces still to be evacuated from Thua Thien include the 14th and 15th Ranger Groups and the four infantry regiments of the ARVN 1st Division. These units are encountering strong resistance while withdrawing and are not likely to reach the Da Nang area without heavy casualties and the loss of much of their heavy equipment. The 147th Marine Brigade, however, has completed a successful deployment to Da Nang by sea.

18. In southern MR 1, Communist forces on March 24 overran two important provincial capitals, Tam Ky and Quang Ngai, cutting off Da Nang's land link to the south and effectively disrupting the government's plan to develop strongly defended enclaves around these cities. Communist units involved in the attacks include primarily the NVA 52d Brigade and the 2d Division, which moved south from Quang Nam Province and swept through several western districts in Quang Tin earlier this month. Government units attempting to defend Tam Ky and Quang Ngai were the ARVN 2d Division and the 12th Ranger Group, which suffered very heavy casualties and are now combat ineffective. Elements of these units, along with the 11th Ranger Group, have collected in small enclaves along the coast, which they are now attempting to evacuate to Da Nang.

19. The capture of the two southernmost capitals in MR 1 will enable the Communists to return their 2d Division to Quang Nam Province, where it could join the NVA 304th Division in pressuring Da Nang. Although activity has been relatively light in Quang Nam Province during the Communist offensive, the North Vietnamese have been picking up some territory in the central part of the province as ARVN consolidates its defenses closer to Da Nang. Defending forces in the Da Nang area now include the ARVN 3d and Marine Divisions.

20. As a result of the recent redeployments and heavy combat losses, South Vietnamese regular combat forces in MR 1 now number 82,000, down from 96,000 two weeks ago (see the Order of Battle map). About 22,000 of these troops are

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in regional force battalions. Estimated North Vietnamese combat forces increased to 85,000 men, as a second regiment of the NVA 341st Division is now believed to have joined the division headquarters and 31st Regiment that infiltrated earlier.

Military Region 2

21. The heavy fighting in MR 2 -- particularly in Ban Me Thuot and along Route 19 in Binh Dinh Province -- and the abrupt evacuation of the central highlands have left South Vietnamese forces badly battered and vulnerable to further setbacks. The ARVN 23d Division was effectively eliminated in the contest for Ban Me Thuot, the 22d Division has suffered heavy casualties in coastal Binh Dinh Province, and eight ranger groups involved in the withdrawal from the highlands are still in disarray and being subjected to frequent Communist attacks along their exit routes. The only government unit fully combat effective within MR 2 is the 3d Airborne Brigade, which was rushed into Khanh Hoa Province from MR 1 last week.

22. In Binh Dinh Province, the South Vietnamese have given up all but a strip of territory along the southern coast that includes the capital city, Qui Nhon. Three regiments of the ARVN 22d Division -- the 41st, 42d, and 47th -- have been pulled back from the battle along Route 19 and from the northern part of the province to defend this strip. The division's fourth regiment -- the 40th -- has been sent south to Khanh Hoa Province, where it will join the 3d Airborne Brigade and the fewer than 2,000 troops remaining from the ARVN 23d Division. These forces have been organized into a task force under the control of the Headquarters, ARVN 23d Division, in an attempt to head off a drive toward Nha Trang by the NVA 10th Division and several independent regiments. The North Vietnamese have already gained a foothold in Khanh Hoa by overrunning Khanh Duong district town on March 22, [REDACTED]

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23. The eight ranger groups now moving out of the MR 2 highlands -- three groups each from Kontum and Pleiku Provinces and one each from Darlac and Quang Duc Provinces -- will not be effective fighting units again for some time. The length of the period required to regroup will depend upon the extent of their losses, which are certain to be heavy. The NVA 320th Division is pressing attacks against the long convoy of rangers and other South Vietnamese military personnel and civilians retreating along Route 7B to the coast. [REDACTED]

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revealed large amounts of damaged and abandoned equipment along this route, including 54 tanks, 63 armored personnel carriers, 59 artillery pieces, and more than 1,000 military and civilian vehicles. Another 2,000 vehicles -- most of them military -- appeared to be moving southeastward toward Tuy Hoa in Phu Yen Province.

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24. The Communists, meanwhile, have reinforced their units in MR 2 with the NVA 316th Division from North Vietnam.

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indicate that at least one regiment -- the 148th -- from the 316th Division participated in the attacks against Ban Me Thuot. Other units involved in the attacks included elements of the 320th Division and a newly identified artillery regiment -- the 675th -- reportedly formed late last year.

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25. North Vietnamese forces are rapidly moving toward coastal areas in MR 2.

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27. The estimated number of North Vietnamese regular combat forces in MR 2 has risen to 51,000 from 41,000 men as a result of the infiltration of the

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The strength of ARVN forces changed from 78,000 to 65,000 men, a result of the loss of some 18,000 men from the ARVN 23d Division and the eight ranger groups and the addition of 5,000 troops in the 3d Airborne Brigade and the 7th Ranger Group, both transferred to MR 2 during the reporting period.

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Military Region 3

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28. Recent Communist main force deployments in the region have focused on Tay Ninh Province, where Communist forces apparently are massing for an attack on Tay Ninh City. [] in Binh Long Province indicate that in addition to existing forces, a new regiment has moved into the area from North Vietnam. [] they are members of the NVA 273d Regiment of the NVA 341st Division, major elements of which are already committed to northern MR 1. The regiment has been accepted into the Communist order of battle for MR 3, adding some 2,000 men to the already serious threat to South Vietnamese defenses in this area.

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29. In Tay Ninh Province, elements of the NVA 9th Division were reported moving into the eastern part of the province from Binh Duong Province [] in mid-March. On March 12, two regiments of the division - the 95C and 272d - overran Tri Tam district town near the Tay Ninh - Binh Duong Province border. By March 20, major elements of the division were attacking in southeastern Tay Ninh - focusing on government positions along Route 22, the key road connecting Tay Ninh City with the Saigon area []

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30. [] major elements of the NVA 5th Division were moving from northern MR 4 into Hau Nghia and southwestern Tay Ninh Provinces. Beginning on March 12, the NVA 6th Regiment of the division launched major attacks against ARVN outposts in the area and by March 19 had captured Duc Hue, a district capital in northern Hau Nghia Province.

31. The movement of the NVA 5th and 9th Divisions toward Tay Ninh City places three Communist divisions in proximity to the city. The 3d Division relocated from Phuoc Long to Tay Ninh earlier this month.

32. The South Vietnamese responded rapidly to these Communist moves by deploying two units of the General Reserve - the new 4th Airborne Brigade and the 3d Armored Brigade - to southern Tay Ninh Province from Saigon on March 13. As Communist attacks gained momentum in Tay Ninh Province, a regiment of the ARVN 18th Division in Long Khanh Province and one from the ARVN 5th Division in Binh Duong Province were deployed to the Route 22 area in Tay Ninh on March 18. On March 20 the JGS ordered the evacuation of Binh Long Province, and two ranger groups located there began their withdrawal to

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Binh Duong Province along Route 13. Finally, during the period March 17-20, two airborne brigades were moved to Saigon from MR 1 for reserve duty in MR 3.

33. Another serious threat has developed in Long Khanh and Binh Tuy Provinces, where at least two regiments -- the 141st and 209th -- of the NVA 7th Division have been conducting sharp attacks since their move from Binh Duong Province in late February and early March. These units overran Dinh Quan, a district town, on March 19, cutting Route 20 to Dalat in southern MR 2. Pressure is also being exerted on Xuan Loc City, the capital of Long Khanh Province, by the 7th and 6th Divisions (formerly the 303d). The ARVN force opposing the Communists in Long Khanh consists of two regiments of the ARVN 18th Division.

34. The commitment of nearly all of the government's forces in MR 3 in either Long Khanh in the eastern part of the region or Tay Ninh in the western part and the withdrawal from Binh Long Province have left ARVN defenses in the central section extremely weak. This raises the possibility that the Communists will exploit this weakness with new attacks directly north of Saigon.

35. As a result of the recent redeployments on both sides, Communist regular combat forces in MR 3 now number 38,000. South Vietnamese forces now total 100,000, of which 38,000 are regional forces.

Military Region 4

36. Redeployments of Communist main forces in the Delta include the movement of major elements of the NVA 5th Division toward MR 3 and the

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37. On the South Vietnamese side, the ARVN 21st Division followed the lead of the NVA 4th Division by moving from Chuong Thien to Phong Dinh Province. The ARVN 7th and 9th Divisions repositioned their units only slightly in Dinh Tuong and Kien Tuong Provinces.

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38. Despite the redeployment of part of the NVA 5th Division out of the Delta into MR 3, recent infiltration into MR 4 has increased Communist regular forces there to 26,000. South Vietnamese forces number 90,000, of which 48,000 are in regional force battalions.

Logistic Developments

39. Communist logistic units are moving large quantities of supplies and equipment to their forces in South Vietnam. Analysis [] prior to President Thieu's decision - showed heavy southbound truck activity in the North Vietnamese panhandle, as well as a record number of coasters and barges at the port of Dong Hoi. In addition, the coverage showed a large amount of SA-2 missile equipment, howitzers, and artillery pieces moving south and two armor parking areas. In northern South Vietnam, heavy truck traffic and a substantial number of artillery pieces also were sighted.

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North Vietnam

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40. [] the southern North Vietnamese panhandle showed several large artillery and armor concentrations on or near the roads leading to South Vietnam. The largest concentration of equipment was in a parking area along Route 1933A just north of the DMZ, where 18 field artillery pieces and howitzers were observed. []

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[] A second major sighting was on Route 1, where five probable 57-mm AAA pieces and a Puazo-6 fire director were spotted moving south. The Puazo-6 is used in conjunction with Firecan radar. In addition, []

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41. [] two major armor parking areas have been established about ten miles south of Dong Hoi. In these areas, 29 armored vehicles were identified and appear to be in a deploying status. The vehicles included 16 armored personnel carriers and 13 tanks. []

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42. Besides the movement of armor and artillery, [] large quantities of SA-2 missiles and equipment moving south in two separate areas along Route 1A. In the first area, 30 miles north of Quang Khe, 15 missile transporters (eight loaded with missiles), three Fansong radars, and

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one probable Spoon Rest radar were observed. In the second area, about 25 miles farther south, ten missile transporters (seven loaded with missiles) and two probable Fansong radars were visible. In all, the equipment in both areas is sufficient to equip at least one regiment.

43. This deployment had one highly unusual characteristic - the identified missile transporters are carrying missiles (rather than the missiles being shipped separately in cannisters). The equipment apparently has been sent a long distance because there were no known SA-2 sites anywhere near this area. Missiles carried on transporters for a long distance run the risk of being damaged and probably would have to be serviced before being put into operation. Such a deployment does strongly suggest the equipment is being sent on a priority basis.

44. In other logistic activity, heavy supply shipments were evident throughout the panhandle. A total of about 90 vessels - a record number for this area - plus four larger SL-type trawlers were present at the port of Dong Hoi. These vessels are probably carrying supplies from Vinh that will be shipped farther south to Dong Ha or offloaded onto trucks. In this connection, heavy truck traffic was noted on Route 1 from Dong Hoi to the DMZ, with several 20-30 truck convoys observed.

South Vietnam

45. In northern South Vietnam, similar levels of logistic activity were detected. On Route 1002 just south of the DMZ, six AAA weapons, one Puazo-6 fire director, and three Firecan radars were observed in tow. Meanwhile, on Route 9 from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh, moderate truck activity was seen, including one 84-truck convoy with at least two artillery pieces parked near Khe Sanh. In addition, the Ninh Xa Armor Dispersal Area northwest of Dong Ha remains active, with more than 30 pieces of armor present, and it seems likely that the Communists are using this facility as a transshipment point for armor moving to their forces in South Vietnam.

46. On Routes 6089 and 616 leading into the A Shau Valley, very heavy activity was also observed, as more than 130 trucks and 29 weapons were detected on these roads. Although precise identification was difficult, there appeared to be 21 field artillery pieces and eight AAA weapons, including four quad-mounted 14.5-mm ZPU-4s. This same pattern of activity was also noted along Routes 548 and 923 along the Communists' western supply corridor in southern MR 1, where

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MR 1

RVNAF
82,000

Marine
1st
2d
3d
Regional
Forces

MR 2RVNAF
65 000

23d
22d
Regional
Forces

MR 3

VC/NVA

RVNAF

38,000

100,000

Airborne
25th
18th
5th
Regional
Forces

MR 4

VC/NVA
26,000

RVNAF
90,000

21st
9th
7th
Regional Forces

MR 4

Military region boundary

Province boundary

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126 vehicles, 4 field artillery pieces, and 2 Firecan radars were seen. Moreover, nine field artillery pieces, of which four were 130-mm field guns, were parked and coupled to prime movers east of Route 548. These weapons probably were headed for the Da Nang area.

47. The armor and artillery moving in South Vietnam, as well as North Vietnam, represent the largest such deployment detected [redacted] since the cease-fire. [redacted]

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[redacted] These deployments, along with the large number of these weapons already in the south, will assure the Communists adequate firepower during the current offensive.

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II. Combat Activity in Indochina

South Vietnam

49. The South Vietnamese suffered a series of major setbacks during the past two weeks, including the loss of most existing government control in 10 provinces. Together with the province captured earlier -- Phuoc Long -- the Communists now have gained control of a total of 11 of South Vietnam's provinces since the start of the year. These provinces represent nearly 40% of the country's total land area.

50. Amid collapsing defenses and hastily retreating South Vietnamese troops and civilians in MR 1, North Vietnamese forces overran Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai Provinces, leaving only Da Nang in government hands. The situation at Da Nang deteriorated yesterday when crowds of refugees mobbed the airbase, forcing it to shut down.

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51. A similar pattern emerged in MR 2, where Communist forces pursued retreating government units out of the highlands, assuming control of Kontum, Pleiku, Phu Bon, Quang Duc, and the remainder of Darlac Province. The Communists are now pressing attacks along the coast. The most serious threats have developed in Binh Dinh Province, where ARVN has withdrawn units from Route 19 to protect Qui Nhon City, and in Khanh Hoa Province, where Communist forces are attacking just north of Nha Trang.

52. In MR 3, fierce fighting took place in Long Khanh Province east of Saigon and in Tay Ninh to the northwest. The South Vietnamese evacuated An Loc during the past week, eliminating the token government presence in Binh Long Province. Combat activity was relatively light in the Delta (see the Redeployments section for details on events related to troop movements during the period).

Cambodia

53. On March 25, the village of Tuol Leap about seven miles west of Phnom Penh was reoccupied by Khmer Communist forces. During its previous occupation, the area was used to fire 105-mm howitzers on Pochentong Airfield, and renewed 105-mm firing can be expected. On the 26th, FANK launched an operation using elements of three brigades supported by an armored personnel carrier squadron to stabilize the southwestern and eastern fronts at Toul Leap. In the "rocket belt" northeast of Tuol Leap, a brigade-sized force is making slow progress in attempts to push the insurgents beyond rocket range of the airfield.

54. More Communist rocket attacks against Pochentong closed the airfield and damaged a DC-8 and a C-130 contract resupply aircraft on March 22. Airlift operations were suspended for two days but resumed on the 24th.

55. On the east bank of the Mekong opposite Phnom Penh, FANK continues to react to KC infiltration of undermanned defensive lines. With support from air force and naval forces, government units have been able to hold. These KC attacks are probably designed to isolate government outposts and wear down FANK units, much as they are doing in the capital's northwestern sectors.

56. Along the Mekong River, government troops were driven from an island across from Banam, facilitating KC shellings on the town. KC forces continue to maintain pressure with heavy shelling and ground probes on both Banam and Neak

Luong. Three positions north of Neak Luong were lost on the 25th, and it appears that the KC intend to interdict the road between the two towns.

57. In the outlying provinces, three more government positions near Battambang have been lost, and three more are in serious trouble as the gradual erosion of government control in that area continues. Continued insurgent pressure and additional losses can be expected, but there is no apparent threat to the provincial capital itself.

III. Other Developments Affecting Communist Military Capabilities in Indochina

North Vietnamese Air Threat

58. North Vietnamese air activity in Quang Binh and Quang Tri Provinces during the reporting period indicates that Hanoi is upgrading its air facilities at Khe Sanh. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] apparently to improve and possibly lengthen the runway. This activity may be a prelude to the initiation of North Vietnamese air transport activity into the south, followed possibly by MIG flights. Although it is uncertain whether the north will use its MIGs tactically in northern South Vietnam, such employment would have a tremendous psychological impact on the rapidly deteriorating military posture of South Vietnamese forces.

Status of Stocks in Phnom Penh

59. Ammunition stocks in Phnom Penh dropped as a result of a two-day suspension of the airlift and increased consumption rates. Rice and petroleum supplies, on the other hand, remained stable over the past two weeks. Authorized drawdowns of government rice have risen significantly in recent weeks to compensate for the negligible amounts of local rice now reaching the capital and to help cover dietary needs of the city's more than one million refugees.

60. The following tables show Cambodian government stocks of critical supplies in Phnom Penh and comparative deliveries via the Mekong and airlift to the capital in 1974 and 1975.

**Critical Stocks in Phnom Penh
March 25, 1975¹**

	Stocks (Metric Tons)	Days of Supply	Daily Con- sumption Rate (Metric Tons)
Rice	8,100	13	645
Petroleum	6,300	19	327
Ammunition	8,900	24	372 ²

1. Data are approximate.

2. Based on average issue rate, November 1, 1974 - March 21, 1975; actual consumption varies considerably from this rate during any given period. Since March 1, the issues have averaged 400 tons per day.

Deliveries to Phnom Penh

	Metric Tons		
	Jan 1 - Mar 25, 1974¹	Jan 1 - Mar 25, 1975	
	Mekong	Mekong	Airlift
Total	156,900	18,050	37,600
Rice	73,800	6,750	12,600
Petroleum	40,300	5,300	6,500
Ammunition	42,800	6,000	18,500

1. Data concerning air deliveries for this period last year are not readily available, but it is estimated that deliveries by air accounted for no more than 10% of total imports for all of 1974.

The Cambodian Navy Riverine Force

61. The combat effectiveness of the Cambodian navy's riverine force in the Phnom Penh area has been seriously degraded as a result of heavy losses of personnel and rivercraft this year. The navy has lost almost 3,000 men or about 20% of its former 15,500-man force. Most of these losses were naval infantry troops who

were deployed along the Mekong. Thirty-five of its 115 riverine vessels have been sunk by KC mines or shore fire since January 1. Only 50 of the remaining rivercraft are operational, and most of these are in need of major overhaul. Repair facilities are seriously overtaxed, spare parts and trained personnel are in short supply, and replacement vessels can not be delivered because of the closure of the Mekong.

62. As a result of these losses and the KC use of barricades and mines, the navy's range of operations is limited to the Phnom Penh area. On March 14 the commander of the navy ordered a temporary suspension of resupply convoys to Neak Luong when three vessels were lost to KC shore fire and mines after they became entangled in a barricade southeast of Phnom Penh. Although the barricade has since been destroyed by the Cambodian air force, the recent loss of two island positions near Banam and Neak Luong will make resumption of naval resupply convoys to this area extremely costly. KC barricades are also located on the Mekong northeast of Phnom Penh and on the Tonle Sap northwest of the capital. Naval activity is limited primarily to ferrying troops within the Phnom Penh area and conducting hit-and-run night operations with one or two patrol craft. These operations are intended to maintain naval presence on the river at a low cost, while harassing KC shore positions.

The Cambodian Air Force

63. The Cambodian air force has suffered the fewest personnel and materiel losses of any Cambodian combat force this year - only 2 of its 200 pilots and 8 of its aircraft - and is still combat effective. Of the remaining 194 aircraft, 145 are in country and 108 (74%) are operational. The sortie rate, however, has exceeded the rate at which proper aircraft maintenance can be performed. This will begin to take its toll over the next several months and seriously degrade effectiveness of the air force.

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